



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **WALDEN IS OREGON'S HOME CARE LEGISLATOR OF THE YEAR**

Access to home health care in rural Oregon is in jeopardy. With the recent closure of St. Elizabeth's Home Health Agency in Baker City, Oregon, access to home health services in Congressman Walden's 2<sup>nd</sup> Congressional district has been adversely impacted. Since the passage of the Congressional Balanced Budget Act of 1997, Oregon has lost over 30 home health agencies.

In recognition his advocacy on behalf of home care patients, caregivers and home health agencies in Oregon, the Oregon Association for Home Care today presented him with it's Legislator of the Year Award at St. Anthony's Hospital in Pendleton, Oregon.

As a part of the Medicare Modernization Act (2003), Congressman Walden was successful in securing an amendment to ensure rural home health providers received an additional 5% payment add-on. This rural add-on payment was extended for one year in 2004 but is set to expire on March 31, 2005.

Stepping up to the plate once more, Congressman Walden is again leading the charge in Washington, D.C. to ensure rural home health agencies continue to receive the rural home health add-on payment under the Medicare program by the introduction of House Resolution 11. In 2004 Congressman Walden sponsored the Medicare Rural Home Health Services Improvement Act, however, time ran out before Congress could act on the bill prior to the end of the 108th Congress, in December 2004. Identical to the version introduced last year, the 2005 legislation HR 11 will extend the add-on payment at 5% for agencies serving rural patients for another two years until 2007.

Today, Executive Director Sarah Reeder traveled to Pendleton, Oregon to present the award. "Because of his collaborative, genuine approach to the health of rural Oregonians, the Oregon Association for Home Care this year recognizes him with its Legislator of the Year award for 2005", said Executive Director, Sarah Reeder. "Congressman Walden is our shining congressional star", she said. "He has gone above and beyond to ensure that patients, caregivers and rural home health agencies, are well served."

In his gracious acceptance speech, the Congressman recalled his own personal journey with his parents through the kind, quality caregivers from Providence Hood River Home Health & Hospice. Pointing out that providing home care in rural areas costs 12-15% more than in urban cities, the Congressman reiterated his commitment to HR 11 along with 37 co-sponsors.

Following the brief awards ceremony, Congressman Walden, accompanied St. Anthony's caregivers on a home visit of a Medicare homebound patient in Pendleton. The ceremony was attended by Oregon Association for Home Care board member, Molly Rhea, Director of Nursing Services / Administrator of Pioneer Memorial Home Health & Hospice in Heppner,

Oregon, and Clinical Manager, Marianne Durkan of Providence Hood River. Also in attendance was Jeff Kincheloe, Deputy Director of Government Affairs, for the National Association for Home Care & Hospice.

The Oregon Association for Home Care is a trade organization representing providers of skilled home health, hospice, in-home care, IV therapy, respiratory therapy and home medical equipment services throughout the state of Oregon.

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